

Letter to H. R. Hunt, September 30, 1921

1921 September 30 Professor H R Hunt Department of Biology University of Mississippi
University Miss Dear Professor Hunt:

Many thanks for your note of September 9 referring to my article "Is Race Suicide Possible"? and asking me how I know that the desire to have children is an inheritable trait.

It had not hitherto occurred to me that any one would doubt what seemed to me to be a self evident proposition almost axiomatic in character, and I am therefore much obliged to you for your note, as it forces me to look into the grounds for the rather positive opinion I expressed.

I think that my conclusion is based upon the consideration of the very helpless condition of the human infant which cannot even feed itself, and which would inevitably die within a few days after birth if it did not receive help from others. Quite independently of nutrition the human baby absolutely requires protection during the whole of a very long period of helpless childhood, otherwise it would die, and leave no descendants behind. The continuance of the race is thus dependent upon the development of an altruistic feeling on the part of the parents, especially the mother's, towards their children. The motherly instinct is thus preserved and intensified by natural selection, until the love and care of children becomes an inherited trait characteristic of the whole human race, to a greater or less extent.

In those who feel love and tenderness towards little children this inheritable trait is more fully developed than among those who look upon children as nuisances to be avoided as much as possible. Those who desire offspring thus belong to the class in which this inheritable trait has been most fully developed.

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I would be glad to know what grounds there may be for supposing that a desire for offspring is not an inheritable characteristic.

Yours sincerely,